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SOME INDIAN STORIES

BY

P. V. N.

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FROM THE HIGHWAY

TO THE

HERMITAGE.

IT was early in Spring: the desolate aspect of Autumn and the dreariness of Winter, were merging into the freshness of life and the comforting and pleasing prospect of Spring. The crescent moon was partially visible, between the leaves of a hoary, overhanging tree, about 10 miles from the head-quarters of a South Indian Taluq, in what is known up to date as "elephant-sticking pit," by reason of its having been a deep hollow at some past time of which history makes no mention, and tradition makes no noise. Two men were talking.

"Look here, Muruga," said one of them, a tall man covered in a black *kambal*,* from neck to foot, to the other, shorter in stature and similarly attired. "A wealthy merchant from the neighbouring village, passes this way, with much money about his person, when the moon is nearly right over your head. We must pick him, come what may—we have not had good luck for many a day now. Go and inform your comrades, and see they are ready in hiding about the place by that time."

"It is hardly a fortnight since you committed the murder—of the *karnam* †—which brought you no gain,"

* A rude blanket.

† Village accountant.

said Muruga coolly. "The people in the surrounding villages have been wide-awake since. This very morning, as I went through the villages, disguised as a workman, I found that the murder was the subject of talk everywhere. Wherever two persons meet, they speak about the murder. The Inspector is in the neighbourhood already, and the villagers have bound themselves to help him to discover the criminal. When your last act is yet so fresh in the memory of all, do you think any one will dare come here—to-night, and alone? Some one has been imposing on you; who is your informant, may I ask you?"

"You may not, you better not," said the man impatiently. "How I came to know, from whom I knew that a man was to pass this way some time hence, it is not your business to inquire. When you entered my service, you took an oath, that you would have ears and eyes for none but me, and no tongue for any one. Have you forgotten this so soon? Go and do as I have asked you to."

"An oath taken in a wicked cause," returned Muruga boldly, "is not binding. When I work for you at the risk of being shut up in a prison, of my bones being pulverised by the baton, and even of having my neck twisted out of joint, I have at least the right of knowing your secrets. It would not do for you to treat me as you have hitherto treated—as if I were a beast of burden that must work your will. Such as you are, you have need to remember my services, and treat me as I deserve to be treated."

"What services have you rendered me, pray"? asked the man in a fierce, jeering tone.

"What services!" repeated Muruga with firmness. "I will recount some of them for your benefit. The very first time you took me to initiate me into the villainy I am now an adept at, being but a recruit, I fell into the hands

of the police. Day after day, for over a week, the police people tied me to the * *mukkonam* and lashed me frightfully ; but they failed to get out from me the name and whereabouts of the leader with whom I had prowled about. A year afterwards, you took me to loot the Nattu Kottái Chetty. You were on the roof, and I let myself noiselessly into the court-yard of the house, and was scrambling my way into the room which, you said, contained the treasure of the Chetty. I stumbled upon the foot of a woman ; and she woke up. She gave the alarm, and the inmates of the house got out with swords and guns and sticks to hunt the thieves down. I could have escaped if I wanted—leaving you, ignorant as you were of what was going on down, to your fate. But I did not. I came struggling up to you in hot-haste, saw you out of danger ; and as I was coming down to escape as best I could, my foot slipped and I fell down heels over head. There, I would have fallen a victim to the fury of the people of the house but for my comrades who happened to lay in wait where I fell, and carried me off from the spot. And I lay on a sick-bed from which no one expected me to rise sound in body, for over 3 months. And only recently—it is not even 4 months now, since it happened—you waylaid an armed traveller. As you were belabouring him, he drew out a *katari* †, and was on the point of running you through the chest when I interposed—with the result, I saved your life and had this dreadful wound on my arm” (said he, baring his arm to the addressee) “ which has not healed as yet.”

Muruga waited a while, expecting to see his companion relent, grow kind to him at the mention of some of the many services he had done him. But he counted without the host. The man whom he was addressing, was only human in form. He did not harbour or retain one single feeling that betrayed his kinship with the rest of

* A sort of a conical stand to which thieves are tied up to be lashed.

† A weapon like a short, double-edged sword, with a pointed end.

humanity. Either he had come into his world barren of all good instincts, or they had become deadened or seared by crime. Kindness but annoyed him, and the remembrance of obligations but irritated him. The look that he bent upon Muruga and the passionate quiver of his lips, would have struck terror into a less daring heart than Muruga's, even in the not very brilliant light of the horned moon. Muruga saw it, and gauged the nature of the man he had to deal with more correctly than he had ever done; and he continued with a slight tremble: "These may not be good services, these may count for nothing in your eyes. But the very knowledge of your being the designer and author of my ruin and misery, of your having led me on from one crime to another till I am now one of the worst criminals that walk this earth, afraid of myself and of every one else, with not a moment of peace in darkness or in light—ought to induce you to be kind and considerate to me."

"What means this impertinence?" asked the man against the tree.

"It means," replied Muruga with a calmness, extraordinary even for one who had lived with the "clogging burden of a guilty soul." "It means, that I can't continue to serve you on the terms I have so long served you. There is a limit to all forbearance. Between you and my soul, which has not grown voiceless as yet, my way to the burning-place is being shortened fast. How I wish I could wash my hands off all villainous pursuits, and settle down into a peaceful situation, and atone for my past life! It is too late to think of such a thing. My heart recoils from myself. Even if it were possible for me to find a peaceful home in some strange land, I could not live in peace. For, how could I forget the past? For me there can be no relief but death. I am at war with all the world—even you, for whom I have heaped up sins, are my enemy now."

"You have been trying to make an enemy of me, boy. You have been playing with fire. You do not seem to know, that I am as constant in kindness as implacable in hatred. To hear is to obey, must be the motto of one who has bound himself to follow such as I am. Go, boy," said the man sternly pushing him away from him, "and do my bidding."

"If you insist on treating me as but a mute accomplice of yours, I part *now* and *here*.———"

"To let loose the hounds of the police whom I have thrown off the scent, whose vigilance I have eluded, and whose efforts to catch me I have baffled for full ten years now—to wake up the indignation and hatred of those whose relatives I have immolated, and gladden the hearts of those who have lost their hard-earned gains to me—to open the doors of the prison-house which I have cheated out of its lawful tenant—and give to the gallows the prey I have kept back from it," continued the man interrupting.

"I shall have enough to do, to look after myself. To ward off suspicion, to save myself from the hands of the police, if not from the gallows—is as much as, if not more than, what I have time and sense for. How can I, then, carry tales against you?"

"If there is no sense in the teller," returned his master, "is there none in the hearer? Know now, if you do not know it already, that once a man becomes one of us, he is ever ours. He does not part alive. If I did not like you, and if you were not a youngster yet--*this* (pulling out a dagger from inside the *kambal*) would have been deep in your heart before half the words you have uttered so thoughtlessly, had got out of your lips. Live and learn, boy. Since you are so very anxious to find out how I got the news about the rich merchant, I shall tell you—but remember, it

will be for the first and last time. I myself impersonated a certain neighbouring villager at the village, and learnt it from the lips of the merchant himself. Are you satisfied, Muruga, now ? ” said he in a conciliatory tone. “ Go and do as I have asked you to do. Time is speeding.”

Muruga departed. His leader watched him disappear behind a bush at a distance, and was muttering to himself: “ This boy must be looked to. Such a spirit portends evil. I am tenfold stronger than he is, and can crush him at any moment, to be sure. Yet to one like me, even a reed may prove a sword.”

A half an hour more; a solitary man rides this way on a pony. Four closely muffled up forms dog him, and fall upon him. A shriek and a scuffle: a life returneth unto dust, the earth is given back a clod of its clay. An addition is made to the list of the deeds

“—————of bloody men,
Whose deeds tradition saves,
Of lonely folk cut off unseen
And hid in sudden graves ;
Of horrid stabs in graves forlorn,
And murders done in caves.”

And into the depths of eternity, a murdered existence sinks “ like a drop of rain,” and not a ripple or a bubble on its surface bears witness to it. Yet, what misery one death causes ! What heart rending scenes it enacts ! I was at the house of a friend not long since, and the remembrance of the unhappiness occasioned by the death of a babe of three months within its walls, I shall carry with me all the days of my life. The mother was bending over her sick babe in the cradle when the awful truth dawned on her, that her babe was no more. What a spasm of pain passed over her face ! She dropped down like one dead rather than alive. And when she recovered,

she seemed to wake from a bed of torturing illness. So haggard she was, and such a vacant look was on her face ! How she cried, how she tore her hair, beat her head, how she injured herself, in her paroxysms of grief, deaf to the consoling words of husband, father, mother, friends and relatives, is more than I could tell or bear to recall. Even now, the thought of her lost child fills the tender mother's eyes with tears, and she never drives by a certain road but stops her carriage, gets down, and cries over the stone standing on the piece of earth that covers the remains of her lost babe. Such is death ! So dear is life ! How many are there in this wide world that can picture to themselves the inevitable end calmly—that can think of the approach of death without a shudder ? Ten—five—two—one ; not even one except in imagination. The most miserable creature in creation does not contemplate death without sadness—without a longing look at the world he or she has to leave. Why, the very *man* who turns fellowman into lifeless flesh and bone without a scruple, without an iota of compunction—why does he avoid his species ? Why does he fear storm, dread darkness, fire, the glitter of a knife ? Why is it that even a shadow sets his heart a-throbbing ? Why ?

Months have passed away. It is the selfsame place. It is also a moon-lit night. Three forms move under, and between trees—they stop and they part. It is the highwayman and his tools. Muruga is not there : he breathes where no tales are told. Whether he went there the way of all flesh or sent by any one, his leader alone could tell. It is all silence for a while, until it is broken by the rattling of a bullock-cart heard at a distance. The cart comes nearer and nearer, and at last it touches the fatal spot. A sharp whistle rends the stillness of the air ; and footsteps hurry to the place. The bullocks and the driver have disappeared in the twinkling of an eye ; and two persons, an old man and a beautiful young woman, stand on *terra firma*. The young

woman falls at the feet of the tallest of the three ruffians, who have dislodged her and her male companion from their places in the cart, and says : “ If I mistake not, you are the leader of these two. We shall part with the last pice we have got with us, sir. Take away my life, if you will; but spare this old man, he is my father.” Feelings choke her utterance, and she could say no more.

As she kneels there to one of the greatest villains the world has ever produced, with a world of entreaty, in her voice and attitude, for the sparing of her aged father—without a trace of any selfish fears—regardless of, and in fact utterly blind to, the dangers to which her youth, her beauty, and the jewels about her person expose her—she forms a subject fit for the easel of a Divine Artist. Thank God, such subjects are not rare: we meet them pretty often in nooks and corners of India, untrodden yet by the cold-weather tourist. The Hindu wife who looks upon her husband as her god to whom her whole life ought to be consecrated, who goes through fire and water, at his sweet will and pleasure, and who believes the surest way of approaching God’s throne is to die a *pathivratha** the Hindu son who considers it his highest duty to live for the sake of his parents, his holiest office to act so as not to cost them a throb or a tear; the sepoy who thinks laying down his life in the service of the *mahbub*† whose salt he eats, the shortest cut to Heaven; the ryot who ascribes the miseries of his position not to the oppressing and high-handed rulers, but to the decrees of fate: these are some of the many living expressions of that sentimental attachment which forms the kernel, as it were, of the Hindu society in villages, which works secretly but surely, and shows itself in a thousand ways every day.

“ Take away everything we have with us, sir ” says

* A chaste wife who dies before her husband.

† Parent. A term which indicates a patron or superior.

the old man gathering courage. "But grant me one little boon which will cost you nothing"

The ruffian looks up from the young woman to her aged father. He—who has traded in human life, who has made a livelihood by butchering, and not known a grain of pity for ten long years is moved by the sweet, mournful pleading of the beautiful woman on her knees.

"What boon is it that you ask of me?" demanded he of the old man.

"Have you a wife, or mother, or sister—some male or female relative depending on you, sir?" asks the old man.

And the man who, at other times, would not have thought twice before sticking his dagger deep into the throat of the creature who had the audacity to put a question like this, deigns to answer: "I have no relative depending on me; but I have a woman living under my protection."

"Does she live close by, sir?" inquires the old man.

"No, about three stones * from here", again answers terrible companion mildly.

"It does not matter where she lives," says the old man. "Only give me your word, that you will ask her when you see her, whether by sharing your gains she shares the sins you commit for them."

I do, returns the robber. "As surely as I expect to live some time longer, I will put her the question you have suggested."

The daughter strips herself of everything valuable on her, and delivers it mutely into the hands of the highwayman. He says, "let them live;" and they, the father and the daughter, live and depart.

Close on the small hours of the morning, a solitary form approaches a mountain-cave—some three miles from the ‘elephant-sticking pit.’ A shrill mewing calls up a flickering light at a chink, and a rude frame-work of mountain-grass which serves as a door, is drawn ajar. The form enters—the entrance is closed.

“I hope you bring good news,” says a female voice.

“Better than I ever brought,” replied the comer, displaying a mass of jewels in solid gold.

The woman advances with greedy eyes to feel the possession of the gold, and appraise its value. The man puts her back saying, “All this is for you and for you alone. But you must answer me some questions before you can have it.”

“Ask your questions then,” says she impatiently.

“How long have you been with me?”

“For about ten years.”

“Have I ever given you cause for a tear?”

“None, you have been extremely good to me.”

“You admit then, that I have never, during this long period, denied you the comforts I could command—I have always allowed you your share, and more than your share, in my ill-got gains.”

“Yes, I say sincerely.”

“You know that I am one of the greatest sinners of the world. I have sinned frequently and horribly: all the blood I have shed and the curses of many, lie heavy on my head.”

“Yes.”

“When the last day comes, as it must come to one and all, shall I have to stand wholly responsible for the

crimes I have accumulated, or will any one else share them with me ? ”

The woman, though avaricious, is superstitious ; and she has too vivid an idea of the tortures that await sinners in hell, to entertain even a thought of laying a flattering unction unto his guilty soul.

“ As the act, so the fruit. For the sins you have committed, you alone are responsible.”

“ Have I led the terrible and detestable life I have led these ten years, on my own account ? Have I sinned only for my stomach ? Have I robbed people, waylaid them, and cut throats, and tortured people for my sake alone ? Have I not often done these to please you ? ”

“ I admit,” says she, “ you have sinned often on account of me, that to please me you have often rushed into crimes. Yet I cannot be answerable for your sins. When I came to you, you bound yourself to keep me in comfort. With any body else—with an honest, God-fearing man, for instance, I should have been just as happy. This is perhaps a hard and bitter truth. But can I tell you a lie ? ”

“ Is it so ? ” asks he in tone of misery.

“ Yes ” is the jarring syllable that falls on his ears. The last scale that blinds his vision falls off. The last straw that is to break the camel’s neck is added : the Mind is prostrate, and the Body seeks refuge in flight. The highwayman casts an inexpressibly wretched and despairing look at the woman : Have you known, dear reader, a beggar who comes into possession of a four-anna piece through some freak of fortune, who importunes hard and adds to it day after day, even at the risk of losing the chances of the day’s miserable sustenance, till it swells into a decent sum, as he thinks, then invests in a

costly purse to hold it, carries it about his person until one day, when he leaves it forgetfully on a *pial*,* it is pocketed by one of those honourable men who think they have a right to everything unclaimed, sees it, and yet does not claim it because he knows the claim of poverty to be no claim at all? If you have, you can have an idea of the despair and wretchedness that the look of the highwayman portrayed? And he took to his heels.

On, on, the cries of the woman and their echoes die away in the distance. Graves, bushes, and jungles are left behind. Three miles are accomplished on the wings of despair and disgust—and the spot, memorable for many a brutal assault and cold-blooded murder, is reached even before the early village-cock hath done “salutation to the Morn.”

He—the bloodthirsty ruffian of a few minutes since, the gentle, meek, and melancholy penitent of the inexorable *Nor*—buries the gold at the foot of a tree, shuffles off the “cloak of night” in which “thieves and robbers range abroad unseen in murders and outrage,” squats down on the roadside his arms thrown across his chest in the posture of deep meditation. The sun scorches him in the day, the denizens of the forest howl and bark round him in the night—in vain. Three days and nights pass. He sits there still—fasting—brooding over his past. The travellers look on him with wonder,—as one whom the earth has sent forth out of its caverns to save men—and approach him reverentially with milk and fruits—offerings acceptable to a saint. He helps himself very sparingly with these, and sits there looking within himself yet, with his eyes never drawn away from what *has been*. The facial contortions that struck terror into people, are no longer seen; the relaxations of pain, sorrow, and repentance, have taken their place. A

* A mud bench adjoining the front wall, forming part of Hindu habitations in Southern India.

week is spent. A bullock-cart passes this way. The driver sees the man on the roadside, and draws the attention of the occupant of the cart to it. An old man gets down—he approaches the sage-looking individual sitting on the roadside. They—the old man and the robber that was—recognize each other. A gleam of satisfaction—of hope—lights up his face. The highwayman abandons his attitude—rises—is off, the old man knows not where. A few minutes more—he is back again. The jewels the old man's beautiful and devoted daughter parted with, on the night, never to be forgotten by the highwayman, are in the old man's hands—and he to whom she knelt that night, is on his knees at the feet of the old man.

Years have elapsed. On the hill, in Sivapuram, a *sadhu* * lives in a cave. He is the cynosure of venerated eyes—he is the oracle of all the town. Who is this *sadhu*, dear reader? You can answer this question just as well as myself.

* Ascetic.

AN INDIAN IDYLL.

ABOUT eight and twenty years ago, a mansion-looking house in the metropolis of the Western Presidency, was the scene of great mirth and rejoicing one evening. Without, it was a blaze of lights. Within, in the soft and gliding light of many big and ornamental brass lamps, men and children were seated or standing on costly carpets, boisterous in their mirth; while several women were moving to and fro distributing lumps of sugarcandy. The house was a Hindu house, and the occasion for the gaiety within its walls, was the birth of a child—a female child.

Nine years passed away. A fairy-like girl,

“Little charm of placid mien,
Miniature of Beauty’s Queen,”

was at play within the house. She was a curious little girl. The sports that generally please children, did not satisfy her; what amuse them disgusted her; and in things which display few features of interest to them, she took a sort of mournful delight. She was imaginative—she was impulsive—she was sensitive. Unlike girls of her age, she loved solitude for the sake of its mute charms, for the sake of the scope it allowed her for the indulgence of her fancies—solitude in which she lived apart from the stupid company which irritated her, and ridiculed everything it could not understand. High-souled poetry and tales of adventures and greatness, delighted her. She was so fond of them that often, while she ought to be at home, she used to be found on some stone or under some tree, in

the gardens behind her house, reading one of these books in her own mother tongue or English. She had a sweet voice; and the untrained expression of it, was so lovely that her father's friends came to the house more often to hear her sing than see her father. The least harshness, in word or look, filled her eyes with tears; while kindness impressed her easily. Altogether, she was a romantic girl—some thought petting was spoiling her, and others saw a meaning in her strangeness. Such was the girl who, at the age of nine, was the pride, and constituted the sole delight of the house.

Eight years yet. The selfsame house harboured a young woman. She was a budding beauty. Her beauty was of a twofold nature; if her person arrested attention, her mind rendered it into deep regard. If Nature endowed her with her fairest gifts to command admiration, her education bestowed on her powers to make it lasting. Her Oriental instincts had been refined in Western fields of thought. She was at once a poet and philosopher, a visionary and realist. There were two aspects to her character. To the unselfishness of the East she added the insight of the West. She was highly imaginative: whether in the house or under the wide canopy of Heaven, in green fields or barren spots, worlds on worlds and "Alps and Alps" did arise to her vision. The poetry of Nature, no less than the poetry of the mind, found in her an ardent student. She cultivated music; but it was music swayed by religion. It struck—it charmed—it lifted the soul into the cloud-capped regions of Heaven where there are no thoughts of the world, and wherefrom its low appurtenances could not be seen. All this she was; but where? Hemmed in by intolerance—in the close atmosphere of custom and ignorance—surrounded by people who could not understand her, who had nothing in common with her, who could not but think her ways sinful, her thoughts but crude beginnings of

attempts to upset time-honoured society, and who considered it the most pious act to imprison mind within the iron-groove of custom. She seemed an exotic flower transplanted into an uncongenial soil, and as such destined to wither and die away.

The child, the girl, and the young woman are all one and the same, and represent three stages of one life; and her name is Naline.

Naline was a day-dreamer. Even amidst her surroundings, she had found a world of her own, a world inconceivably vast, encumbered by no useless existences,—where all were happy, all were noble—where each was disinterested, and each saw his or her lot “the lot of all”—where every head wore the crown of immortality, and each hand wielded the sceptre of influence. She lived in it—she roved in its open fields and gardens unchecked—she held secret communion with its pure spirits and she pitched her ideals too high.

“Is this a character taken from life? Did Naline live? Does she live?” the reader will ask.

She did live—she does live though only in the grateful memory of her friends. If it was given to you my dear reader, to know her at any time, you might have been to-day better than you are, you might have felt nobler than you do, you might have been less sceptical to-day than you are about the glorious goal of human destiny. As I write, I have before me a likeness of Naline’s, as she was a little while before her death. In the lines of her forehead, and in her darkly pencilled eyebrows, I read still the same imaginative and poetic disposition that characterised her as a girl. In the dark orbs of her eyes, there is the same dreamy expression that made her revel in solitude then. On her lips plays the same enchanting smile that made her a favourite with all in spite of her

waywardness. And in her labial curve, and the stern cast of her chin, there is perceptible the same impatience with levity and mischief that isolated her from her companions in her girlish days. She has a roundish face, a highly intelligent forehead, a Grecian nose, and long wavy hair.

In her partiality for the mind, Naline forgot she had a heart. She loved the songs of birds—she loved to gaze on the gloomy charms of the twilight—she loved to look on, and speculate about, the duties of the starry host. In fact, the mute intelligence of every type of life, every phase of Nature, formed her study—touched a chord of sympathy in her. But she did not know what love was. What that holy feeling is which makes gods of weak, dumb-driven men and women, she could not understand. Nowhere in the range of her vision was to be seen a single ray of love. And what was the result? According to the custom and the manner of the country, her parents chose a young man for her husband. And she accepted without a grumble, one who was to prove all that one who could make her happy, ought not to be—one who could not understand her, could not know what veins of immortal thought lay imbedded in her as in a mine. He had intelligence—he had abundance of what is called cleverness; but he had not a heart. Therein lay untold misery. His intelligence and cleverness only made him formal and pedantic; he had one manner to all he knew, and even to his young, sensitive, and charming wife his expressions were cold and studied. He allowed her no share in his concerns. Her concurrence was a matter of course. Her opinions must needs chime in with his. She must mould herself to suit his sweet will and pleasure. She must be a subordinate and not a companion. Such were the notions that dominated his mind—and which ever in evidence in his conduct, galled Naline, and rendered her miserable. With such a husband, and a mother-in-law who was the sole dictator-dictatrix and umpire in all disputes, with very straight-laced notions of pro-

priety and decorum, all of the most antiquated and approved style, full of "old saws and instances" to support her dignity—Naline could not feel at home in the home circle. Like a flower caught in the cruel current of a mountain-stream, she tossed about and drifted on in silent pain.

The heartless pedantry of the husband, while rendering him blind to the beauties of his wife's nature and mind, revealed to him the showy side so to say, of her accomplishments. Anxious to pass for a man of taste and culture, he takes her out on occasions to exhibit her points like those of a rare and intelligent animal in his possession; and thus a speciously calm and placid surface is sometimes thrown over the fierce under-currents of her lacerated heart and soul. Why analyse him more? Like the bee—if indeed a person who, if he liked anything at all, liked the luxury of idleness, could be compared to a bee—which accustomed to flutter from flower to flower culling sweets, when confined to a single flower, however delightful and inexhaustible in its honeyed wealth, loses its vivacity and joy—he fretted at, and struggled inhumanly against, the recognition of the union that bound him to her.

The pleasures that she had derived from imagination, in her father's house, did not come to her rescue now. They were lost in the chilling indifference and matter-of-fact manner that reigned about her. The stoppage of the vibrations of her mind, awakes her to the consciousness of her heart's unused-up resources. She feels the want of sympathy. She knocks at it when it could not be opened—she seeks for it when it could not be found. Where—oh! where—are the charmed ideals of her virginity—those protean forms that flitted before her vision, things of enchanting beauty? They have sunk deeper and deeper into her mind—into one of its deepest recesses.

Her *veena* * talks nothing that can carry comfort to her heart, and reconcile her to her lot. The rich pathos and feeling of her voice offer her no diversion from the contemplation of her husband who takes no pride in her performance, and whose dormant spirit it has not the power to rouse. Thus, like the bridegroom, in the tale, who shrinks from the cold and deadly clasp of the stone demon that comes between him and his beauteous and beloved bride by right of the ring placed, by mistake, on her finger—she feels repelled by the contact of a cold and unfeeling heart, from the touch of those who hover round her by reason of their kinship with her. Thus—living and yet lifeless—she drags on a weary existence—for a time.

Before the scene changes, for all scenes must change in this world,—while the shadow of Naline's misery is still on me, while the sympathy excited in me by the processes by which her lofty and beautiful mind and heart were being distorted, is yet fresh—let me pause and try to read the secret of sorrow here. Could you, my reader, you who are speculative—tell me how it is, that this world comes to be full of contradictions? How is it that contrariety and discord flourish out of the union and harmony of design and order? How is it that Oramasdes and Ahrimanes, work side by side, and at cross purposes? How is it that goodness, gentleness, and beauty spring into existence but to be blighted? How can you account for the fact that the poetical, impulsive, and sensitive Naline with eyes open, and without a grumble, entered into a companionship which was to last as long as life, with a man who was formal, pedantic, and unsympathetic? How is it that the Sun scorches but to develop, and the rain cools but to putrify? Man is born but to die, and Eve knows but to sin. It is Fate—Fate—all Fatalism.

* The Indian guitar.

II

Imagine to yourself a drawing-room, rectangular or polygonal, big or small, decorated or not, for the shape, the size, or the character of the room is of no consequence in my narrative—in the town, the place of birth and growth of Naline. There are three persons there. One of these is a young lady, strikingly beautiful, in the graceful Hindu *saree** and jacket with short sleeves, seated at a piano—and she is Naline. Within two yards of her, are two low chairs occupied by two men. One of them is athlete-looking, and the only thing remarkable about him besides his symmetry, is the listlessness he seems dissolved in—he is Naline's husband. The other is an Englishman, an old friend of his, who having been for a long time absent in England and on the continent, has returned recently and somewhat suddenly. He is speaking—his face is instinct with enthusiasm. As he turns from the face of the companion, by his side—which looks as staid and unaffected as if it belonged to a statue or were painted clay—to that of Naline, and reads in her rapturous blushes, in the mute but eloquent expression of her eyes, her interest in, and attentiveness to, his talk—he glows with undreamt-of pleasure, he grows more and more like himself, a charming conversationalist—and his flight gets loftier and loftier. Italy which has the “fatal gift of beauty,” Rome, the “city of the soul,” “lone mother of dead empires,” “the Niobe of nations,” her immortal Tiber, her holy dust which speaks of Caesar, Antony, and Brutus, of triumphant Sylla, and ancient Scipio, of her liberty, and Rienzi, and Venice which

—looks a sea Cybele, fresh from ocean,
Rising with her tiara of proud towers,
At airy distance, with majestic motion,
A ruler of the waters and their powers,”

* A piece of cloth or silk, from 9 to 10 yards in length,—worn by Hindu ladies—which forming a skirt, passes up over one shoulder, and falls in graceful folds at one side.

—her Tasso, her Rialto, “Shylock and the moor, and Pierre”—Ferrara, Florence, and Clarens, their beauties and their glories: these which he has seen and contemplated, are passed in kaleidoscopic review. View after view, charm after charm is analysed with the soul-stirring brilliancy of one who has come, seen, and conquered with the mind; and Naline, his sole audience—how is she? What thinks she? She feels irresistably drawn to him. She wishes she could cling to him—and who can have the heart to blame her?

For the first time in my life, I beheld an extremely beautiful picture. The very dreamy attitude of the subject of it, the hope and joy that radiated from her reticent eyes—charmed and commanded my eyes. I stood, and I felt I could never be tired of gazing on her. I wished—oh! how sincerely!—that I could stand always at her feet and look on and on—into eternity. “I saw or dreamed of such.” If you have seen, or thought or dreamed of such, dear reader, you can understand what Naline felt herself to be while listening to her male visitor—you can sympathise with her and feel for her.

The talk kindles, in Naline, feelings she has been a stranger to. She forgets herself, forgets the stolidity of her husband near her; and she seeks the piano mechanically. At the touch of her unconscious fingers, the instrument evinces signs of life—breathes, expands, and soars, and discourses touching music. I have read, somewhere, the flow of the Rhine compared to a lyric and the scenic variety of the Alps to an epic. And which shall I compare this music to—to the deep yet gentle pathos of the lyric, or to the frightening yet ennobling loftiness of the epic? Certainly to the former: it flows on smooth, sweet, and rippleless, the swelling, unfathomable, and varied life of feeling, pain, disappointment of hopes, ambitions and aspirations of youth and innocence, of capacity and ability

—struggling and careering at the bottom—until, under an influence it has no control over, it thins away and disappears into the stubborn realities of life. Overpowered, Naline cannot proceed further in her song—and she leans on the piano irresolute. The instrument into which she has infused celestial fire sends forth the last of its soul-stirring notes, gasps, and is still. To her husband all this is mere “sound and fury signifying nothing”; but he—the other man—understands it all, reads the past history of a poor imprisoned soul, in every note and tone, is affected by it, and is mute. Thus is born the soul-knowledge which foreshadows the love to come, with its joy and misery, ecstasies and agonies.

Days pass away. The friend is no longer there—he has gone away to pay a visit to his people. And Naline and her husband find a temporary home in a far-off town. She lives her usual dull, and monotonous life, recurring in her mind often, with fondness, to the relief she found in the Englishman’s company—until a surprise befalls her. As chance would have it, the Englishman goes to the town intending to make a short stay there on account of his professional business. He passes, of an evening, through a certain street in quest of an acquaintance of his—the impassioned words of the song of a female voice, and the sweet strains of what seems a distant piano come stealing to his ears. He stops—he hears—and he is rivetted to the spot. The past is before him as large as life:—the feelings he thought he had nipped in the bud, discover all on a sudden their vast growth—the memories he imagined he had consumed with reflection and wisdom, shoot up like the fabled phoenix on its ashes—and the image of a form he fancied he had managed to forget, comes up vividly before his mind’s eye. He hastens—he quickens his pace—and presents himself at a certain house in the street. And Naline and the Englishman are face to face. They have many opportu-

nities of coming in contact with each other—and these are looked upon as Godsend, and are of no slight consequence to both. Naline revels in the sympathy of her English friend—for he is no longer an acquaintance—oblivious of the petty persecutions of her mother-in-law, the interference of her husband, and her own loneliness; and he, her admirer and confidant, feasts his hungered spirit with sight of her and speech with her, and fondly builds castles in the air. This cannot always be. The serpent soon finds its way into the Eden. The busybodies comprising an Indian household have eyes and ears—and these *must* have their use. They see—they hear—they rush to uncharitable conclusions. The frequent contact of a woman with man cannot but lead to sin. Besides, what has a married woman to do with a stranger? She ought to look on her husband as her god, and ought to worship him and sacrifice at his altar—and can never be too mindful of his comforts and too dutiful to him. So they think, and begin to act. To them the pure friendship between man and woman, has no reality—the noble sentiments of cultured and imaginative youth, have no existence but in a morbid mind—and the innocent pleasures of true mutual sympathy are deceptions and snares. They set to work—to draw a hard and fast line of demarcation between Naline and her friend, to make her life unbearable in her isolation—with the result that he seeks a meeting with her, and passionately declares his love for her. The declaration does not surprise her. She has long expected it, long seen how he has tried hard to throw a veil over his feelings, if not to kill them, how he has nobly avoided the ground whereon he could not trust himself. And now that he, without giving a single thought to himself, asks her to let him go quite away and spare her all causes of disturbance to her peace of mind, she recognises the stuff he is made of, understands the self-sacrifice he is capable of making—feels thankful to God that it has been given to her to

fervour knows no abatement. Why bring the lover back to complicate matters, and disturb the peace? He has talents, becomes a writer, a poet, and enters Parliament—but never marries. His image has never faded from one heart—and she takes delight in reading of his success and fame, cherishes the recollection of what *once* was, and thinks of what *might have been* with just a faint sigh which is drowned in the loving kisses she gives her children.

WHAT DREAMS MAY COME.

SIVAPURAM is a famous place of pilgrimage in Southern India, and has one of the oldest and largest temples in it. Adjoining the temple—which with its nine huge towers covers an area of about two furlongs, and which is said to have been built, in olden days, by a powerful Sivite king in whose praise tradition is loud—is a hill believed to be the incarnation of Siva, the destroyer of the Hindu Trinity. Sivite mythology has it, that once upon a time Brahma, the creator, and Vishnu, the protector, had an unseemly passage-at-arms as to the superiority of each over the other, and that they made a boisterous appeal for decision to Siva, their friend and colleague. And he elongated himself into this hill, and prescribed, by way of purging this choler, that of the two he who touched the top or bottom of it, was the greater. Vishnu took the form of a big mole, and set to burrow under ground; and Brahma metamorphosing himself into a bird, was off on his wings towards the summit. Thousands of years passed; but neither of the rivals found himself within a measurable distance of his destination. Brahma's patience was nearly gone, and observing a screwpine falling towards the earth, he asked it where it was coming from. "I come," it replied, "from the top of this hill; and though I have been falling for ages I don't see signs of earthly life as yet." This was surely not encouraging. Nor was Brahma inclined to lose his point. So, he got the flower to depose to his having touched the summit, and returned to the earth with it. But Siva with his prescience, saw through the duplicity, and condemned the offending god to a bodiless existence on earth. Hence it is, it is said,

there are few temples dedicated to Brahma in this world, and that the perjured flower is not acceptable to Siva.

I was on a visit to this interesting place several years ago, and staying in a house almost at the foot of the hill. I loved a pretty sight. And the hill presented a most picturesque one, with its huge gallery of green views, in moonlight. I was looking at it, one evening, from the pial of my house, when I was interrupted.

"Sir," said a voice, "I feel quite exhausted; but I have full ten miles to walk before I can rest my weary limbs in my poor hut. If you will be so good as to give me an anna or two, I could buy something at the next village, eat and rest on some pial or under some tree till sunrise, and then walk home. You look a magnanimous soul, sir. Pity a poor fellow like me, appease the hunger of a way-farer—and I haven't passed through my mouth even a drop of water all to-day—and God will bless you. God will see, sir, that none of your children and children's children are ever in want or pain."

"What kept you here till so late in the evening?" I asked, somewhat surprised at the tone so much above his condition.

"According to a vow of mine," replied he, "I have been here every Tuesday, for several years, to go round the hill. This morning, I started from my village late, and hence my detention till now."

And I believed him. Caius Mucius Scaevola held his hand over the flames until it was ashes—because of the love of his country which held the betrayal of his country's secrets to be a greater pain than that of torture. Paoli of Corsica ordered his men to open fire on the walls of his enemy even though his only child was placed exposed to it—because of his patriotism which held personal sacrifices light in comparison with those of his people. Latimer

entered the flames with a light heart—because of his hope “to kindle such a candle in England that day as shall never be extinguished.” And Cranmer thrust deliberately his right hand into the fire—because that had affixed his signature to his recantation and thereby belied his conscience. If these are characters that shed a halo of undying brightness on the pages of history—then, is the illiterate Hindu in the villages, who reduces himself to misery and suffers without a murmur all kinds of self-imposed hardships and tortures for the sake of his religion, a fit subject for ridicule? The rude verses that celebrate the piety of a Hindu king of olden days who hacked his only son and heir to pieces to cater for the amusement of a sadhu, are still the only things treasured up in the hearts of many a South Indian villager. And I have myself seen—oh! how often!—wealthy men turn away from wealth, position, father, mother, home and friends, become religious mendicants and go about from door to door begging their food; poor men pierce their cheeks through with wires, walk with thorny sandals on, run on live coals, and roll over hard uneven ground round and round the very hill in Sivapuram: all in accomplishment of the vows taken in the name of their religion. Laugh not at these, ye men of light and preachers of other religions! They, in their ignorance, are more worthy of your respect and admiration than those who, with all the paraphernalia of education and enlightenment, are content to be moral cowards—who let the “native hue of resolution” be “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought!”

“May I ask, what made you take this vow?”

“Certainly, sir. To answer your question may be to stir up feelings which have slumbered in this bosom for some time, and irritate wounds that prayer and penitence have in a way healed. But that shall not be in the

way of my satisfying your curiosity," said he and fell to evident thinking. Loath to disturb, and wondering what could be the thoughts that occupied him, and little dreaming of the generous and lofty spirits that lay entombed, as it were, in his heart, I held my peace till collecting himself he said :

"I have not always been what I am. At one time I was a man of wealth, a man of position and respectability in a populous and flourishing town in the South. How I lived ; how friends flattered me; relations fawned on me ; how people, high and low, paid court to me : it is unnecessary to tell you, nor is it pleasant for me, such as I am, to dwell upon. To me, the very thought of what I was, is fraught with much pain. Besides, what I may say about the past is not likely to be believed by you or any one else. I had a child—a young boy of about 7 years of age. In an evil moment, one evening, he went into a garden behind my house—rather the house that was once mine—in company with a cousin of his, a boy of about the same tender years. And what did he see ? A cow belonging to a *bairagi** living at the further end of the street, had strayed into the garden and was nibbling away the soft grass my son meant for his favourite goat. Half in anger and half at the instance of his young cousin, he picked up a stone and threw it at the cow. The stone, as chance would have it, struck against one of its hind legs and lamed it. The boy little knew how dearly he would have to pay for the injury he had thus caused the cow. When I came to know of what had occurred I sent for the bairagi, explained to him how his cow had gone lame, and offered to buy for him a better one. The bairagi said, in the circumstances, he, though a grown-up man, would have done exactly as my son had done; that my young boy, whom he knew to be

* A religious mendicant vowed to a life of celibacy:

too tender-hearted even to hurt an ant, was not to blame; thanked me for my offer to buy him a new cow, and went away. There the matter ended. So I thought; and I thought of the affair no more—until that occurred which fell like a thunderbolt on me, blasted all my fondly-cherished hopes, and left me but the phantom of what once was a frame quick with living energy, to tread this earth a woe-begone and sorrow-laden stranger. The evening following that of the cow-incident, my young boy disappeared. I ran in search of him hither, thither and everywhere—sent men in all directions to get some clue to his disappearance, but in vain. How I spent the night, it is needless to recapitulate; enough to say that the next morning I tottered out of my house a different man. My friends could not identify me: so much I had changed in a night—and what worked this change in me, I need not tell. The day passed in fruitless search after my lost child, and unavailing tears brought to my eyes by recollection of him. Night followed day—and who could arrest the course of time? I sat up in my couch, my mind full of all kinds of wild thoughts and conjectures—a miserable prey to my feelings. Overcome with the fatigue of two days and a night of violent anxiety, I fell into a slumber, even as I sat. How long I sat up thinking, and when my inability to withstand the demands of Nature put an end to it—I cannot tell; nor can I tell when I woke up with a start, and in an awful fright, that night. What brought me back to my waking senses, was a dream I had. How frightful it was! The mental tortures I suffered the two days, were nothing compared with what I suffered that night. Even now—at this distance of time—it makes my hair stand up like thorns, to think of it.”

He paused as if for breath. And perceiving the tremor in which the last words had been uttered, I said: “You are too tired to continue your painful account now.

When you have rested a while, you may return to it. Don't trouble now."

"Don't think for a moment, sir," said he, "that I broke off because in my present bodily condition, I could not continue. A feeling of dire fatality that made a swoop at me that night—of the suicidal character of the resolve I came to that night—crept over me, sir, and I stopped to analyse it. That is all. It is all over now: it has passed away. I told you I had a dream, it was in this wise: Methought I accompanied the bairagi home on the evening of the cow incident. I saw him take his seat on a pial of his *matam*.* His face changed, his eyes flashed forth strange fires, and he muttered in a low tone, which sounded deadly in my ears, "I will be fearfully revenged on that boy." All night he lay scheming and devising to wreak his vengeance on the unhappy boy with impunity. The day dawned, it waxed and waned; and the bairagi lay in wait at his door for my poor boy. Many a time he came into the street in the hope of finding my son alone. But every time he went back with a sullen scowl on his face, for the boy was either not to be found there, or to be found in the company of some one. It was drawing near 5 o'clock in the evening, when the bairagi sneaked out of his *matam* into the street for the last time. And what a gleam of triumph was in his eyes—as he saw and realised that his intended victim was alone at his doorway, and nobody else was there far or near to spy him! He went to the chud with a bunch of plantains in his hand, and promising him many an amusing sight at his *matam*, walked back into it arm in arm with him. How joyous and playful the child looked! And how grateful, too, to the villain who was to prove his deadliest enemy. Child as he was, sir, he had made an enemy, an enemy that would shrink at nothing and stick at nothing. They went into the *matam*, the door

* A house built, by private charity, for the use of religious mendicants.

closed behind them, and the boy was not to cross the threshold again alive. The bairagi——”

“It was a dream—was it not?” asked I interrupting.

“Yes, it was a dream—but not a dream born of an excited mind. It was a message to me from the dead. The bairagi,” continued the way-farer, “went into an inner room, and came back with a lot of rags. He secured the door, that had closed behind him on his entrance into the matam, carefully from within, and even before my little son had recovered from his astonishment at this proceeding, he thrust the rags into his mouth. Safe thus from the suspicion that the cries of the boy might have aroused in his neighbours, the heartless villain began his work of butchery. A big woodcutter’s-knife and the hands of the wretch, between them, turned the boy into a mangled heap. As he carried the corpse into a room to be there huddled into a bamboo basket until the darkness of the night should facilitate the removal of all vestiges of the horrid deed, some drops of blood fell on the floor. The bairagi, in the hurry and excitement of the moment—and which criminal could flee from himself?—did not notice this; and there the drops of blood remained, silent witnesses and irresistible evidence of his guilt, crying to God and man for vengeance. Night advanced; and under cover of darkness, which veils for a time all villainy from human sight, the murderer took the boy’s clothes and buried them in an obscure corner of the matam, and the corpse by the side of a big rock in the river-bed not far from it. This was my dream, sir. You can better imagine than I can tell you what were my feelings when I woke up—to brood over it.

“My first impulse was to run to the river, and make a search—so life-like had been my dream! But friends and relatives made me desist. And I waited feverishly counting the moments as they crept on with a mourn-

tain-weight—waited for sun-birth. Then I hurried to the river. And whom should I meet on the way, but my brother—coming in hot-haste from a neighbouring village about 10 miles off? He had had a dream like mine, and had left home while it was yet night on the same quest as mine. There was no time to be lost in tears, nor would tears come to relieve the pain that sat on my heart like a nightmare. We went together—as fast as our legs could carry us—to the river-bed, both firmly impressed that we were going to look upon the mutilated body of our child—to my brother, sir, my son had been as a son. And there as large and ominous as ever rock could be, stood the one we saw in our dream, putting out its tongue into the river-side. And under that tongue, there was a small circle of sand freshly thrown in. We fell to digging, we dug, sir, with our hands—we dug even as jackals dig for carrion. And must I tell what we saw? A sight to turn an unborn babe grey—and it is a wonder to me that I was not struck down dead on the spot. We saw our child in a state I hope it may never be the lot of any other parent to see his child in. Nor could we have recognised him but for the ring on the right toe. What passed there—I will leave untold. It is a tale one could not bear to tell more than once in life. And it has been my fate to tell it over and over again—and yet to what purpose? What man could save, sir, where the gods are against us?”

He took a long pause. And I let him continue when he chose.

“We went to the matam from there. And that was locked! No body knew the bairagi’s whereabouts. The police were called. And they broke open the door. In the identical spot we had described to them from recollection of our dream, drops of blood were seen. And in a corner hidden by garden-implements of sorts, lay buried my son’s clothes. What better evidence could you have had to estab-

lish the guilt of the bairagi? Yet none believed us—none of those who had the power and the means to trace the murderer! And there was even a suspicion in the minds of some that we, between ourselves, might have done the deed for which we invoked the vengeance of law on the bairagi's head. For, how else could we know the exact spots in which the body and the clothes had been severally buried? That was the argument against us, sir."

I could only give him my mute sympathy. And he continued amidst sobs: "There is little more to add. When law and justice turned deaf to me, I resolved to spend everything I had—even if it came to selling my wife's *thali**—and find the bairagi and punish him as best I could. I have kept the resolve so far as the spending goes! And I have been a weary wanderer over most parts of this world. But I am yet to find my man."

One more pause. And he concluded: "I pray to God, we may never more cross each other's paths in life."

In the agony of his feelings, he did not seem to remember why he had started narrating the story of his life. Nor did I remind him.

* The marital string worn round the neck.

MARY.

I do not know how it was ; but she had my sympathy almost from the moment I took up my residence, at Srivilas, in Bazaarpet. She looked so different from those living around her—and was at once their better and lesser. Her dress and way of living showed a refinement that her rude, hard-working, half-clad neighbours could not but be impressed by, while her manners, though apparently unremarked by them, were too free and easy to be thought respectable. She lived alone though very young ; and though by no means good-looking, she was superb in white and pale yellow—a fact that she seemed to have realized to the fullest extent. All this, to my mind, pointed to a history, and I longed to know it.

One evening, I was pacing up and down, as was my wont, on the terrace of my house. There was a shriek, and a bellowing outside. And I looked over the parapet. She was being chased by a bull, and as she ran for her life she was almost in the track of the wheel of a dog-cart turning the corner. I gasped for breath for very fear ; my eyes had lost their vision in the fearful agitation of my feelings. And when I could see, clearly, the carriage had passed off ; and she was lying at the corner all of a heap. To run down the steps, was the work of a moment ; and in another, I was by her side—but only to look on a corpse as it seemed. My heart grew dark with anger and hatred against the inhuman wretch who had driven off leaving her to die thus. And at that moment, I could have wished for him, his family and his race, a no enviable place in the region of the shades. But I was not given time to do so. For soon, there was a movement in what, I thought, was a

corpse. And she opened her eyes slowly, as if it pained her to do so, or doubtful whether she was opening them in the world she had known or elsewhere.

"Are you very much hurt?" I asked.

"No", said she with a gulp at her throat. "The carriage might have passed over me; but I escaped."

"And the driver did not stop even to help you?" I asked again.

"How could he? He is a big man," said she sitting up. And as though conscious she had not made herself sufficiently clear, she continued after a moment's pause: "You do not know who I am; or you would not be here. Go away, people are coming this way."

"What does it matter?" I asked.

"Nothing to me, but a great deal to you", replied she with a tremor in her voice. "I am a bad woman. Don't risk your reputation for honesty by stopping to speak to me in the street."

"It doesn't matter who you are. Come home with me. My servants will attend to your bruises. Then, you may go home."

And it was no easy task to get her to do this. When she did come home after all, she would not sit down before me, or let my servants take her home.

"Why are you so stubborn?" I asked her, put out of humour completely.

"You know not what harm you have done yourself by bringing me here," she said in her clear, uncompromising tones.

"Don't think of me. I have not done myself any harm, I know. Will you tell me at least who you are?" I asked.

"I am a bad woman."

"You have told me that before. Tell me if you are a native of these parts."

"No. I was born in Northern India."

"A Christian, or a Mahomedan?"

"Neither, I was born a Rajput."

"That is?"

"That is, that I have lost caste to be a Rajput still. But I am not a Christian or a Mahomedan."

And when I found that she would not utter a word more or less than was enough to answer my questions, I told her: "If you feel it a trouble to talk to me, you may go. If not, I should like to know something about you. Whatever you may be, I see you are sorry for what the fates or circumstances have made you. And I would serve you as far as I could, if you would let me."

"You are very generous, sir," said she with tears in her eyes. "But I don't think that there is any hope for me. However, I shall tell you my story—if for nothing else, at least to show you that I am not what I am from choice."

And she continued:—

"My father was a stern man, and my mother a most loving woman. And I lived alternately smothered by the one's caresses and frightened by the other's treatment of erring relatives. So, one day when my mother set out on a two days' journey to see some relatives, and 5 or 6 days afterwards, a friend of our family, an old woman of about 60, came to me with a message that I was to join my mother, I was only too glad to go with her without giving my father any warning of it. But when we did come to

the end of our journey, it was not to join my mother, but to be ushered into the tent of a *Sab*.^{*} I had seen a white man only twice before that in my life. They passed through the street we lived at. And such were the things told of them by my play-mates, that for very fear I could not venture out into the street alone for long afterwards. So, when I found myself actually in the presence of a *sab*, my feelings were by no means such as I could describe to myself even now calmly. In fact I went off into a swoon for sheer fright, and when I came to myself the old woman was nowhere; but what was my surprise to find beside me a girl that used to frequent our house once upon a time! In my distress, I fancied her come to take me away to my father, and fell upon her and cried as I had never done before in my life. She, too, kept up the illusion. And when, that night, I was put into a bullock-cart along with her, I fully believed I was going home. But two days afterwards, I was at least fifty miles farther away. And then, that wretch told me that I was indeed to see my home no more, but that, if I behaved well, like herself, I could enjoy all the comforts that *sab's* money could command. My grief could have moved any one. And I feel sure, that if the *sab* had seen me then, such a generous man as I knew him to be afterwards, he would have been moved to send me away home. But I was not allowed to see him; and my caste-girl was a fiend. For two whole days I would not touch any food. And the consequence was, that I took ill, and lay on a sick-bed for several days. The *sab* attended on me so tenderly all through the period of my illness, and my girl companion so assiduously filled my ears with stories of the joys and comforts in store for me—and faith and hope, too, are so strong at 16—that when I got well I calmly resigned myself to my fate. A year later, while camped at a small

^{*} Short for *Sahib*, a term of respect generally. It indicates a European, in the language of illiterate Indians.

village, a gang of dekoits broke into our tent. The sab, who was a touring military officer, defended himself and us as long as he could with his sword. But when he found that he must sooner or later be overpowered by the dekoits, he shouted out to us to run away and escape, and rushed at one of his assailants. The assailant parried his blow, and aimed one in return that must surely have laid the sab low had I not, in sheer anger and anxiety, thrown myself on him, and thus unconsciously made his weapon fly off his grasp and himself a prey to the sab's sword. In the meanwhile, help arrived; and the dekoits beat a retreat. But, it was not before my girl companion had been sacrificed to their fury. The night we spent after that, God only knows! To think of it now, I can't but wonder that I survived the horrors of it. But, to tell you the truth, sir, the memory of them was soon lost in the joy that succeeded. The sab came to my room; and fixing on me a look, that I seem to see even now, a look full of love and grief, he said: "Mary, (that was how he used to call me) I owe you my very life. And I don't know if I can ever repay you. But tell me if you like, and I will send you away to your friends and relatives this very moment." And when I told him how stern a man my father was, and what might probably be the price I should have to pay for running away from him, he seemed to gather hope, and asked me: But do you want to go away? I could make but one answer. Gratitude, for his exceeding kindness to me all through the time of my stay with him, and my love, inspired by his generosity and highmindedness, struggling within my bosom for expression, I said I could never go away from him except with grief and pain and that if he but wished it, I would go with him anywhere, all the wide world over, and be happy and contented. Then he took me into his arms, and told me how he had been deceived by the old woman who had brought me, how he had been kept under the impression,

until recently, that I was the daughter of a prostitute and that my mother had sold me away to her. "But," said he, "if you have learnt not to be sorry for leaving home and relatives, and will try to love me a little, I will wipe away the memory of my unconscious cruelty to you in the first instance—that is, of course, if love and devotion can do so." Could I help swearing to him in my wild, enthusiastic way that I would never, never leave him, come what might?

Seven years I lived with him; and these were years of such happiness as I could never have known had I lived among my relatives and friends. But the moment of parting came, came in another shape than I had had any, the least glimmering of. My husband, the sab, was one of the many victims claimed by the cholera epidemic of two years ago in Rangpur, a place beyond the seas; and my troubles began again. The night of his death, anxious to save him, I went to call in an English Doctor, in the neighbourhood, who was a friend of my sab's. When I poured forth my tale of woe into his ears, he readily promised to do all he could to pull him through. "But you must stay here," said he. "Your presence by the bedside of the patient would be a trouble. Besides, I want some trustworthy person to be here to send me the necessary medicines whenever I need them." I believed him, and in my anxiety, I even consented to put up with the torture of suspense, away from the one whose love and life were all that were left to me in this world. But when he came back an hour afterwards, it was to tell me of my sab's death and hold me a prisoner within his walls. Wailings and entreaties were of no avail. And even as my loved one was being carried to his grave, I had to accept a new protector. Oh! the horror of it! I could have stabbed him to death if I had so much as a knife in my hand. Days crawled on. And I had to bear the vile professions and loathsome embraces of this man, who seemed a very devil

compared with my God of a sab, knowing as I did, how powerful a white man was in these parts, and that I had none there whom I knew, or who could sympathise with me—till a light broke in upon me one day. The compounder in charge of the Doctor's dispensary, wanted a certain prescription that he had written out the previous evening. Searching for it among the Doctor's papers, I came across a heavy envelope. And I handed it over to the compounder under the impression, that it was the paper he wanted. But opening it and reading a few lines of the contents, he returned the whole thing to me saying, that it was a copy of my dead sab's will leaving me some money. How my heart bounded with joy! I could have set fire to the whole house, and run away unmindful of consequences. But the knowledge of my surroundings asserted itself soon enough, and, pretending to restore the cover to its place, I secreted it in my *choli*.* From that moment, my one thought was how to secure the original will and the property mentioned in it, and get away to a place where my hateful protector could not get at me. But it brought no solution till one afternoon, when, standing in the verandah of the sab's house, I observed a steamer casting anchor. And the belief unaccountably crept into me, that there might be some one in it who could come to my rescue. Acting blindly on it, the next morning, as soon as the Doctor was out visiting, I went to the quay. But when I saw there only a crowd of boatmen, my hope vanished away; and from sheer exhaustion I sank on the ground. But it was not so bad after all. Seeing me, an Englishman, whom I had not observed before, came up, and asked me what the matter was with me. To look at him, I gathered hope and courage—he seemed so much like my own sab. Nor was I mistaken, for in sooth he proved even as generous as my Lord was in life. I asked him if he knew Colonel James sab—and on his answering,

* A jacket, covering a portion of the body, with very short sleeves

"yes," I sobbed out the whole story of my life. And it made my heart so leap with joy to hear the oath that rose to his lips at the mention of the Doctor's deeds. He told me in a tone so full of kindness: "Come here this day week about this time, and bring the copy of the will you have. I will not only take you away from the black-guard's protection, but make him give up the original will which he must have with him."

I was at the quay at the appointed time. And by that evening the steamer of which my deliverer was Captain, had put at least a hundred miles of difficult, roaring sea between me and my goaler. And a week afterwards, I landed at Machli, to find a benignant sky and a peaceful little lodging. Three months later, I received by post a heavy cover containing the original will, and instructions as to how to secure the property bequeathed by my sab. Since," concluded Mary almost with a sigh of relief, "I have secured it, and I have travelled, too, a little. I have been here for about six months—the hills and the river of his place, are too much of an attraction for me to think of going away soon."

I had heard her with great attention. And when her story ended, I know not what it was that made me stare at her as if I were staring into vacancy—whether it was deep commiseration for Mary, or unbounded anger against the detestable blackguard that had tyrannised and terrorised over her for a time. However, I picked myself up and asked :


"Can you not go back to your parents?"

"If I could not make up my mind," said she, "to go back when I had been away only a year, how can I do so now? By father would kill me. And if death must

come, I would rather, it came from other hands than my father's."

This was many months ago. Yet I catch myself exclaiming sometimes : O dear, O dear, how much is parental hard-heartedness responsible for, in this world ? Is caste stronger than love, and convention deeper than truth for Mary to be ever again peaceful without remorse, and happy without a blush ?

THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

OU ask me, how I am enjoying myself. I would rather tell you, how I pass my time. Not that there is no enjoyment of any kind to be had here. No, there is a good deal of it around me, to judge by the happy faces and pleasant manners I notice everywhere. But to me, as you must know by this time, pleasure is like a pill given to cure bad humours. And pills can't be taken, you know, every day—at any rate, not with convenience or profit to one's self. However, I can tell you how others enjoy themselves—while I am looking on. And that, I am sure, would interest you far more than if I answered your question—supposing, of course, that I could do so.

We have had a busy time of it all this week. It was the business of pleasure and excitement that engaged us—not that of what you might call work, official or otherwise. Of the latter, we have at all times no more than is good for our digestion and helpful to our growth—what a happy existence ours must look in your eyes!—just enough, to give the masses a delightful sense of not being ruled over-much. But during the week, just gone, we had to suspend even that—for, who knows so well as we, how to play the fool in season?—and that in the interests of racing.

Our race-days are, more or less, all alike. The same crowd for a furlong or so, along the course, on either side of the Stand; the same faces at the stand; the same couples—husband of one and wife of another; the

same bettors at the book-makers'; the same rush; the same hallooballoo day after day. So, at least, it would seem to an outsider; but to one who knows—the place and the people—each day, and for that matter, each hour, each moment, has its peculiar interest and instruction. For, where does life run into one current for two moments together? And, particularly, in a crowd turned out to please and to the pleased—where the present shuts out all prospects of the future, the moment's affairs are everything and those of eternity nothing—where accidents hang by time's beaks which anything might uncloset—where eye may meet eye, hand may touch hand, a rustling may cause a turning, a word may teach a cunning—and the whole past erased or the entire future blotted out? Where? I don't pretend to be one of the knowing few. But, I haven't been a dweller here for so long without catching something, at least, of the flotsam and jetsam of the life around me—and who could? As such, I could not but notice something that happened on one of these race-evenings.

I was standing at the landing above the flight of steps leading up to the top floor of the Stand, watching the crowd at the distance, when my ears caught the indistinct hum of whispering voices below. I looked down; and I saw a lady on the arm of an official lion of the place, coming up. I had seen her before—and frequently. I had always thought her coarse-looking; and her dress too! I am by no means a judge of woman's dress—but somehow the impression had taken hold of me, that her angel's wings and over-frilled neck had not helped to relieve the prepossession against her face. But that evening? She was a new being altogether. Dressed in white, she looked almost beautiful. Her face and figure seemed to have acquired a charm and a grace I had not remarked before. She was evidently very happy. I made

way for her to go on, and moved into a groove of the gallery, wondering what might have changed her so. A female voice arrested me.

"Who is that over-dressed woman they are making so much fuss about, over there?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"And yet you have been three weeks in the station."

"That is no answer to me."

"I suppose not. But it is surprising, you should have wasted so much of your precious time without paying your respects, as they call it down here, to the first lady in the place."

"You don't mean to say, it is Mrs M—"

"I do, and that man she is leaning on, is her husband's greatest rival. You don't know how these natives could show love outside and nurse hate at heart. They are awful. Our beauty is evidently trying her wiles to charm away the enemy's power."

"How can you talk like that?"

"Mine is fulsome flattery compared with what others say."

"But that can't justify you, surely."

"You have the spirit of the old country yet, my girl. Wait a while, rub shoulders, and see if you can still moralize—"

There was a rush and a confusion—the third race had begun. And I lost sight of the talkers for the evening. The races over, I was looking out for a friend who was to drive me home. And once more I became interested.

"Good evening. Don't fail to bring your friend tomorrow morning. I shall be waiting. Don't disappoint."

So, with a smile and a hand-shake, the first lady was hurrying away. And the friends?

"You are a favourite there—eh?" said one.

"Yes, but one of the many."

"I don't understand you."

"You are dull—that's all. Once on a time, she was a——roaming the streets for pelf. Now, she is a respectable one roaming the city for pleasure, with power and position in her gift."

"And you patronise her?"

"No, my dear fellow, that is not it. She does all the patronising. I am only a protégè. If I were not, that——of a husband of hers—you don't know what a native——is——would be down on me in some way or other. And I should lose my butter, if not bread and butter together, before long. Necessity is a great educationist, my boy. He educates us out of our little prejudices and scruples most wonderfully."

With this philosophy still ringing in my ears, I went home.

II

I am not a lawyer, I know; and I don't understand legal technicalities, and can't unriddle legal conundrums. But you can't get me to admit, that the object of Law is to protect the wrong-doer rather than the wronged one; that the only way of getting at truth, is to pervert it—of administering justice, is to turn against the man whose blind faith in your laws has brought him a suppliant to your door, and put him at the mercy of his enemy; that to show he

has suffered, one needs to show he has been good from the day of his birth. Don't talk like a professional man, my dear fellow; professionals don't see the right clearly. Their path to success, lies through petrified feelings and dead principles. A medical man was called to the bedside of a patient some time ago. He examined the patient, satisfied himself there was no hope, went home, and deliberately sent him a medicine to end his sufferings in this world, as he said. Through some mistake or other, the medicine was not given. And the dying man rallied and got whole. When the medico heard of it, he sent in a bill for his 'services.' Here is a professional for you! I can give you another instance, if you like. A pleader was engaged to defend a friend. For some reason or other, the counsel had to be changed. And what do you think, the legal luminary did? He offered his services to the other side *gratis*; and made use of the information he became possessed of as pleader for the defence, and ruined his first client. There is the professional sense of right!

So, forget you are a lawyer, and take a common-sense view. Take the view of a man with a mother, or a sister, or a daughter any one of whom may be put in the position of this unfortunate woman. And say, if you can approve of the proceedings in the court. Here was a woman, wife of one of the biggest men here, a leader of society, most cruelly wronged. A foul libel, referring to a long past date, was sprung upon her by a coward hand as the only means of ruining her husband. She, like most people who have had no experience of law-courts, went to court for justice. And what justice did she get against her vile traducers?

Day after day, for several months, an inquisitorial inquiry into her past, was held. One after another, a whole host of social lepers—men who lied for money or paraded for notoriety—were trotted forth to prove—for

sooth!—that she had been a bad woman always, and so, had no right to appeal for protection, and anybody could take any liberties he liked with her name with impunity. A counsel—a notable type of social pariahs himself—was on his legs, as often and as long as he liked to be, reveling in imaginary foul pictures of a vicious life that was, or might have been, or could have been. And thus, when malice and jealousy and perjury, helped by a debased mind, had worked their full measure of mischief—when a vile libel had been dignified by a so-called judicial inquiry—when the talk of the town had become the scandal of the empire, and the reputation of the aggrieved woman had become as a piece of meat thrown to the vultures and hawks of the air—the judge made the great discovery, that he could not try the case, and dismissed it.

And this was JUSTICE! The *judge*, a tall thin man lost in admiration and awe of—the *counsel* for the defence—whose exuberant animal spirits stand him in good stead as he rolls out the sesquipedalian verbiage of a foul imagination, provoking the grin and the smile of youthful friends and admirers around, elaborating and amplifying the lispied lies of—a worn-out ancient *hireling* in the dock: there is the group that needs to be painted and labelled, ‘AIDS TO JUSTICE,’ and sent to every man or woman who ever feels tempted to seek the protection of Law against the inhumanities of villainy!

III

You say, I am day by day growing more and more cynical. But if I were—which I am not—would it be a wonder? Rather, would it not be a wonder, if I looked to the bright-side of things only, and kept a smooth tongue, pleasant manner, and cheerful face in spite of the things I see around me. I dare say, I am at times hard—hard enough too, perhaps, to make you seriously ask yourself, if

I have any faith left in humanity yet. But who can smother his indignation and measure his language in the face of a spectacle like this?

Mrs. M—was going away this morning. Her feelings could be imagined. Whatever else she might not have been, she had been, for nearly a decade, a prominent figure in society here, accustomed to homage, of no ordinary kind, from friends and foes alike. Now, she was turning her back upon all this, and under circumstances to render her past doubly dear and her pain of parting the more poignant. Any one who could withhold sympathy from such a one, was, I should have thought, a creative mistake—who should have found his place where toads and snakes and other lives of the sort flourish.

I went to the station. I saw a large number of people on the platform. I thought they had come to see her off. I thought, how kind, how generous? The gods had not departed from us; there was still some good and blessing left in the land. Nature had triumphed over convention. And here was a lesson to the official who, in his malevolence, had set up as a purveyor of official morals, and forbidden even social intercourse with the ill-starred couple! So I thought and dreamed and speculated. But with what little warrant after all! Mrs. M—turned up a little while afterwards. But not a soul moved to receive her. I was still hopeful. They didn't want to defy the official order openly, I thought. She went into the waiting room. Minute after minute, the Railway Clock in front had ticked away, persistently and ominously. But, there was no sign of recognition on the part of any of those on the platform. Yet I saw, amongst them, men and women who had played assiduous court to her in the days of her power—men and women who had debased themselves to her as to a Queen—who had thought it a boon to be noticed by her, an honour to drive with her or sit at her table—

men and women, too, who would have been nowhere, who would have been beggars for mercy and favour and notice all the days of their lives, but for her! And that was purity-spirit, my friend!—Christian spirit!—gratitude! If I told you what I thought of it—of those who exhibited it—you would call me cynical. And for once, I might restrain myself and provide against your reproaches—particularly, as I am anxious to hasten through this distressing and disheartening picture of human depravity—and it was no less.

Mrs. M—waited. And to add to her tortures, the train came in half an hour too late. How the time must have passed with her, I need not speculate. Nor have I the heart to say, how she looked as she sat or rather lay against her chair with a handkerchief held to her eyes, afraid evidently to look this way or that—for fear of catching any one's gaze—counting the moments feverishly, nay, madly. The train steamed into the station after what seemed an age. She got into a carriage. And as she rolled away with tears in her eyes and one longing painful look at the scenes she was leaving—perhaps, for good—I could not help hoping, that some day the justice of the courts will be reversed—and rightly—and the ingratitude of society punished—and properly—by her coming back to rule over it as she had done before for years. But mine seems at best a forlorn hope.

THE GHOST OF A KISS.

TIME has robbed me of many of my loves, as it has broken many of my idols. But, there is one thing that I am as rich in to-day, as I was when everything around me wore the fairest hues, and all seemed sunshine and smiles. And if the future looms gloomy, now and then, it is only a future that owns it not. It is my love of a moon-lit sky and stars-set waters.

For two years, I lived in Bazaarpet, half a village half a town, with one of the most magnificent rivers spanned by one of the grandest bridges in India. During this period, I could not have missed many opportunities of witnessing one of the most thrilling scenes it has been given to me to see. Steel blue volumes of water—glistening and darkening, and fretting and dancing, impatient of obstacles and yet kind from innate good nature, hastening on, as it were, with a message to the Deep, unmindful of aught else, between hills standing like the dumb guards of an Eastern seraglio, watchful and formidable and yet hazy and dependent—look one harmonious sheet, at certain seasons of the year, beaming grey and silver under the rays of a Summer moon, all longings hushed in reality, calm with the sense of eternity, and considerate from a feeling of joy. I saw such a spectacle many a night. And at this distance of time, I see myself, as I felt, the same night after night—excepting one. And *that*, I could never forget.

I had taken a young friend of mine to see the sight I so loved to see. Being something of a poet—a childish, old fellow, very much of ‘a pendulum betwixt a smile and a tear’—I thought he would appreciate it. But, I had

not the ghost of an idea, that, by doing so, I was seriously endangering my reputation for being a peace-loving citizen, or that I might render myself liable to be hauled up by the police for manslaughter. We were standing, leaning against the railing of the bridge; and as usual, I was not long in getting drunk with the view outstretched before me. But when I came to sobriety, and turned to see how my friend was enjoying it—what did I see? Horror of horrors! He was lying all on a heap at my feet; and a moment more, he might have found his exit through the iron bars, and been somewhere in the air, half-way between me and a watery grave. To catch him by his arms, and drag him to the middle of the bridge's breadth, was as much as I had the time and presence of mind to do. The rough handling brought him round. And while yet recovering, he confided to me a secret which, I hope, is rare in life. "I don't know why it is that I feel so helpless," said he; "why the thought of *her* comes back to me so vividly and so painfully after so many years. Perhaps, she could know the feelings that come into a sensitive heart amidst a scene like this! Or I might have enjoyed it with *her*!"

"Who is she?"—I could not help asking myself with a very big note of interrogation mentally. But, I did not wish to interrupt him out of mere curiosity.

"She was very much like me—sensitive, sentimental, and stupid. And I loved her madly—so like a god and a devil! In my eyes, there was no equal, nor even a second to her, in mind, morals, and face. I worshipped the very earth she trod on; and to win a smile of hers, I could have readily sacrificed myself for the meanest in creation. But to see her attentive to another in any way—oh! it was like being under the rack which will not let you rest, and will not let you die. I could have hammered the man out of life as though he were a cur, or

ripped him up like a beast of prey. Only, I ran away and escaped from myself at such times. As for herself, she could never be in one mood or mind about me for a single day. She confessed herself in love and out of love with me over and over again. And she was a sister and a love, by turns, at least a dozen times. But her change, if change it was, was from a childish distrust in her feelings and not from clear intention. And through it all, her clinging trust in my own love, and solicitude to possess my esteem, never varied. So, I hoped that time would fix her affections, and for me, and added, link to link, in the course of years, till my love became too heavy a chain for me to hug or to throw off. But hope never left me till, one day, one that professed to be my friend wheedled her into an actual falsehood. I went to see her, as usual, and was waiting for her in the hall—when she came out of the study, after a *tete-a-tete* with him, and straightway told me—I don't know what possessed her at the time—that I was making myself 'horrid,' and that he was good and noble, and she had given him an appreciative kiss. Oh! the feelings of the moment! I don't know whether it was the feeling of life, or of death—whether it was absolute phrensy, or utter stupor. When I woke up, I found myself stretched on a sofa, with *my friend*, my *once* loved one, and her mother seated close by. I got up with a new and refreshing sense of freedom—though a freedom given to grope in darkness—and I answered the kind inquiries of my hostess with a ringing, hearty laugh. And I got away—away from *her*, and out of her life. I worried no longer. But I had forgotten what it was to love. The only feeling I was capable of thenceforward, was contempt—contempt for all around me, and even for myself at times. And the only pain I could know, was the sight of her. From a slender, sweet-eyed girl, she seemed to have grown into a big, dangerous woman all of sudden. Her words breathed poison. And her very touch seemed to sting

me. Four or five weeks passed. I was taking my usual walk, in the People's Park, of an evening. I heard a voice behind me; and turning, I was face to face with her. 'Won't you forgive me?' she said in a most penitent tone, and burst into tears. None but a devil, could have turned away to see her as she looked. And I had not developed one quite yet. So, I let her speak through her tears. And to hear the tones that had once thrown me into ecstasies, it seemed as if my old love had come back to me. But it was only for a moment. The spectre of the past stood before me. And I saw the girl I loved as Heaven, glowing in another man's arms, kissing another man's lips. And I fled like a mad man, leaving her still sobbing. I have not seen her since," closed my friend. "But I heard the other day that she was about to marry. To think of it all standing here, I feel I have, in sooth, been horrid. Many a good woman has married a bad man for love, and reformed him by the might of her goodness. Why should not man do the same to the woman he loves? Why should I not have done so? She was not bad—the kiss was, no doubt, a whim of hers. Why did I not forgive it? Why did I not take her unto my heart again? *Her*—who is so much like me, who alone can understand me, of all, in this world?"

* * * *

Three months later, I was still in Bazaarpet, when I received these hurried lines from my sensitive, sentimental friend:—

"I have run away again. The kiss has once again come between me and my love. One more chance was given me to redeem the past, and be happy. And I have let it slip through—I have fled from it. God help me!"

THE SECRET OF THE SANDAL-PAINT.

THERE was unusual bustle in the retired nook of Kam-lapoor. The usually quiet, and staid-looking house of the Deputy Collector, was invaded by sight-seers of all sorts and conditions. Workmen and maid-servants forgot, for once, the irresistible stateliness and formidable position of the biggest official in the place, and rushed across his threshold, through the yard, and into the verandah, anxious and whispering. And there sat the mistress of the house dissolved in tears, all splashed over with sandal-wood paint, with dishevelled hair, and her chin against her knees. A yard or two from her, with a grinding stone and a silver vessel between, stood the servant, his hands covered, wrist deep, with the paint shaking and shivering for very fear and anxiety. And opposite to him, stood the Deputy Collector staring alternately at him and his wife—determined, as it were, to size up the guilt of either. The spectacle could convey but one meaning to those around.

The Deputy, in his two decades and more of judicial existence, was never known to be any thing but just, just with the justice of an ardent admirer and advocate of the 'lawless science of our law.' Friends and distant relatives had stood before him to be judged. And he judged them, if severely, literally according to the dictates of his law—and never yet a whisper went abroad, that he had spared for friend or kindred. Still, there were a few—there will be such everywhere—who wished to see him as the avenger of the guilt of some one very near his heart. Now that such an opportunity seemed to present itself, they craned their thoughts forward to see how the justest judge would behave. Nor was he behindhand. With

his characteristic indifference to anything but the interests of Justice, the Deputy went to court, prepared to publish his own disgrace abroad, if need be.

* * * *

"How long have you been in the Deputy Collector's service?" asked the Crown Prosecutor.

"For ten years," answered the accused.

"How often have you given your master cause to complain of your conduct in these years?"

"Never."

"Never!" repeated the lawyer sternly. "Tell the truth, or it will go hard with you."

"Never!"

"Is that your deliberate answer?"

"Yes—never."

"On the 18th of May last, were you not in the town?"

"I was."

"And in the Deputy's house?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me, if you were not grinding sandal-wood at 10 o'clock that morning."

"I was."

"Did not your master's wife come to ask you, if you had done your work?"

"She came."

"What did she say to you?"

"I do not know."

"Could you hear what she said?"

"Yes."

"Then, what was it that she said?"

"I do not know."

"Tell me, or you will be punished."

"I do not know," was the stubborn answer; and no end of threats from the Bench, could make the accused say anything more.

"At least tell me," asked the prosecutor following a new plan of attack, "if these garments belong to the Deputy's wife."

"Yes."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw her dressed in them that morning."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I am."

"Do you recognise the sandal-paint marks on the jacket?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me, what the marks look like?"

"I don't know."

"Look again. Don't these impressions look like those left by the hands of a man?"

"Yes."

"How did these marks come here?"

"I do not know."

"Did you notice them when the lady came to you?"

"No."

"Then, are not these the marks left by your hands?"
There was silence—and silence the accused persisted in, inspite of threats from Counsel and Judge.

This catechising went on for many weary days, now the catechiser being the Crown Prosecutor and now the Counsel for the defence. But the accused never varied his statements, nor his silence, nor his '*I-do not-know's*' when he did not want to answer or tell the truth. With his unimpressionable temper, his unswerving bluntness, and impenetrable silence—the ex-servant servant of the Deputy Collector turned out an unparalleled wonder to all that saw and heard him. And the Judge, if his feelings leaned anywhere, they did so more towards the accused than the accuser. To look at him and turn to the woman, her accuser, who, in her loud and amazonly way, charged him

with laying violent hands on her with a view to outrage her modesty, he could have taken his oath that, if there was any criminal in the case, it was not the accused, if there was any attempt at seduction, it was the woman's and not the man's. Yet, what could he do in the face of the accused's admissions and dogged silence in answer to certain questions, in the face of the woman's clear-cut charges which were not denied? What could he do but prepare himself to adjudge the man guilty and award to him the penalty of the law? Yet, in hopes of discovering some loophole to exculpate him, he had granted adjournment after adjournment. And the last that he could possibly grant, was come. He was in his place at the appointed time. And as he looked around, he felt as though he were himself the accused in the case. To look at the man in the dock, calmly awaiting his fate, and yet with an intensely appealing look in his eyes, his heart went out to him. But, there was his duty appealing to him too, appealing in trumpet-tones through the Crown Prosecutor. Nor did the stoic slowness of the old Counsel for the accused, give any hope. But, when the old man actually got up, and asked the Court's permission to examine the accuser, the woman, again before closing his case, the hearts of many, in the place, leaped up unaccountably with delight. The permission was, of course, granted, and the Counsel began :—

“Is this your jacket?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am very sure.”

“Will you wear it here to prove it is yours?”

“I will”; and she wore it without the least hesitation or reluctance.

“You say, that the accused laid hands on you.”

“Yes.”

"Can you show how he did so?"

"Yes;" and she crossed her arms on her bosom.

"Keep your hands as they are." And turning to the Judge, he said: "Now, I request your Worship to look at the woman closely. The sandal-prints on the jacket, coincide with her hands and fingers. Two days ago, I received information which, while establishing the innocence of the man in the dock, represented the woman in quite an original character; this but confirms the truth of it. My informant is lying ill at a village about ten miles from here. If you will grant an adjournment for the last time, for two days, I shall be able to produce him in court."

* * * *

Two days later, the following evidence was recorded by the Judge:—

"I am a *mali** in charge of the garden adjoining the Deputy Collector's house. On the morning of the 18th May, I went, as usual, to look after the watering of trees and plants. There is a mango tree in the garden, just by the side of the left wing of the Deputy's house. It commands a view of the verandah of the house. Finding that there were several ripe mangoes on the tree, I got up to pluck them. While doing so, I heard a voice in the direction of the verandah. I turned, and saw the Collector's wife talking to her servant who was grinding sandal-wood. 'If you don't do as I tell you, I will make you feel sorry for it,' said she. 'How can I do such a thing?' said he in reply. 'To prove faithless to the salt I have eaten—to call you, whom I have called mother, a wife—oh! I can't do it?' 'You won't do as I ask you then?' asked his mistress again. And on his repeating his former reply, she put both her hands into the silver vessel containing sandal-paint, threw them across her breast, and set up a howl. I was horrified at the spectacle; and for very fear, I got down and slipped away to my village unperceived."

* A gardener.

AN IDEAL UNDESIRABLE MAN.

"**H**E is an ideal man, but all the same an undesirable one!" Such was the remark, half a puzzle half a cynicism, that floated across the threshold of my room, in the wake of a slight Summer breeze, puckering up the screen towards one side—half-way into it, and striking upon the tympanum of my ears, startled me out of my bed one after-noon. I opened my eyes as wide as I could, and was still debating to myself whether I had or had not heard a voice in a dream, when there was a rap at the door. "Who is that?" I asked. And for an answer, the screen was pushed aside, and my friend Mr. B. stood before me, a very image of bustling mortality.

"Were you talking at the threshold?" I asked again.

"Yes," was the reply. "I was giving a bit of my mind, as a farewell-gift, to a young friend."

"About an ideal undesirable man," I queried almost involuntarily.

"I suppose you overheard me," said my friend drawing a chair and depositing himself in it. "You were always a sly, dangerous chap in sleep. One can't talk even in whispers, relying on the reality of your sleep, but you must make a mental note of every whisper, and surprise us with your memory when you get up. You are positively dangerous," concluded he assuming a mock-serious tone.

"But I hope, I have not proved dangerous this after-noon."

"You might have. However, I don't wish to be hard

on you, especially as you are as little responsible for your conduct in sleep as a mad man is for his pranks. But let that go. Are you engaged for this evening? Have you got to manufacture any copy for that wretched rag of yours, which has done peaceful citizens and honest officials as much harm as a rag of its Lilliputian dimensions could?"

"No," said I, refusing to be teased by my friend's good-natured criticism of the paper I was connected with. "I shall be glad to place myself at your service."

"That's all right. And if you are well-behaved, you shall not waste your time quite in my company."

And my friend got up, shook himself up, and was off with his wonted indifference to anything least like ceremony, without so much as giving me warning—leaving behind him a trail of disturbed thoughts and memories.

That evening, I found myself presented by my rough-and-ready friend to the most popular man in the town. This man was an attractive figure on my horizon, while I could see him but at a distance, amidst the haze of hearsays; but now that I was face to face with him, he seemed by no means very remarkable. His mustache was only like hundreds that I had seen before, his height was the same, his face also—in fact, all of him and his, that I could see in the light of the lamp that blazed to our left, was such as seemed, in no way, to justify the popularity he enjoyed. And I was feeling half-disappointed, when there fell on my ears—with brutal clearness, calm deliberation, and clear purpose—the words: "You are guilty, how can I help you?" I turned. My host was talking. And I wondered, if this was the secret of his influence over all that came in contact with him—this cold-blooded candour—this unsheathed, skull-splitting phraseology of his!

Over two years passed away. I had received a lift in my profession. But, it was not such as I should have attained, had I been left to myself. My ideals and aspirations, indeed, glowed with a grandeur and a passion I had not known before. But they glowed only in thought. And the practical work I had tried to do, with a view to realize them, lay almost abandoned. I dreamed to accomplish great things. But I waited, from day to day, doing nothing, ignoring every thing—for a day to accomplish them, a day that would not come. Opportunity after opportunity offered itself for me to make a step in advance. But I let them slip through, deliberately, unconcerned, hoping and believing that some day I should be great—whether I worked or not. My friends wondered; my relatives grumbled. But I cared not what they did and thought, till one day the post brought me a letter. “I have expected much of you almost from your childhood,” ran the letter; “and I hope I shall not be disappointed.” This was all that the letter said. But its suppressed feeling of disappointment and reproach glowered at me, and burnt into me—till I looked a criminal in my own eyes. Question after question rose, in self accusation, to establish my culpability. Had I wasted my time? Had I done wrong? Had I actually withdrawn from the path that led to my goal? Had I grown callous to those to whom I was bound by all the obligations of nature, love, and gratitude? Yes, yes, yes, yes—came the answer, regular, curt, and unequivocal. Then, how was I to mend, to expiate? By beginning to work, in however obscure a station, by getting away from *his* influence.

To get away from *his* influence! The influence of the man I loved—loved more than a friend, more than a son. Ah! there was the rub! The loftiness of his mind, and the purity of his life—were but partially expressed by his universal popularity. Wherever I had turned, I had seen but the temptations amidst which he had been

pure, and the hardships and troubles amidst which he had been noble. But what of the stolid indifference, asked the questioning spirit now, with which he had added year to year frittering away his extraordinary powers in empty, useless talk? The stoic neglect with which he had looked on, while those around him were in want and pain, waiting for fortune to slip into his hands unperceived? The brutalism with which he had made mince-meat of the feelings of those who were as good as he, if not as great, ringing the changes on the superiority of race and family? And so on, and so on. And I said to myself rather audibly: What an ideal undesirable man! The familiarity of the exclamation caught my ears. And I remembered the remark of my friend on the memorable after-noon.

It was a hard struggle between love and duty, inclination and wisdom. And thanks to his absence at a distant place, I got away, after all, from the town he lived in—got away from dreaming to work. And even before a year had elapsed, my heart-ache withal to get back, I found I was better off, and progressing steadily and surely to my goal.

Long afterwards, business taking me to his vicinity, I went to see him. He had just declined an appointment that would have secured easy circumstances all the rest of his life, simply because the gift came from one who had purchased success with the ruination of thousands about him. To know this, and look at my ideal, my old spirit of adoration seemed very near coming. But I looked around in time. The signs of want, the sallow pictures of poverty, the ghosts of things that might have been, glared at me, as large as life, beckoning me away threateningly and yet entreatingly. And I fled—fled for very love and hope!

MY HERO.



THAT publicly most abominated but privately much loved of poets, in the ostensibly most unpopular, but really the largest read of his works, wanting a hero, characterises it as an "uncommon want." And that was, probably, Byron's experience. But mine, fortunately or unfortunately, is a far different one—for, with me a hero has been a very common want. From the earliest date that I could go back to in my life, it has been so; and I have sought, found, lost, and sought over and over again some thing to adore, some one to deify. It was, no doubt, this that a matter-of-fact friend of mine had in his mind, when he told me one day, that if I had no living being to worship, I might have worshipped a stone. And although I have my doubts as to whether a stone could ever have supplied the place of any of the flesh-and-blood idols that I have broken up to now, yet the fact remains, that the lumber-room of memory holds so many of these shivered fragments that it would be by no means an easy task to pick them, arrange and label them to any purpose. Nevertheless, it must be admitted, that the subject of this sketch is a hero of a type I have never seen before. At any rate, he has many recommendations which none of his predecessors in office ever possessed. In the first place, he is not a hero of my seeking. Secondly, he has had my homage in spite of me. Thirdly, he has been sound for a good long while. Fourthly, his pedestal has risen higher and higher with advance of time. Fifthly, he does not know that he is a hero. Sixthly and lastly—what is more than all these—he threatens to live—that is, to be in good sound condition—through my life, and kill my want once for all.

Such are the distinguishing, or rather the unique, characteristics of my hero. My introduction to him took place in a school-room many years ago. And my earliest recollections of him are associated with at all dark-complexioned man with a long beard, thick moustache, long drawn-out lashes, broad but compressed brow, fiery eyes, with particularly thick fringes, white *pugreed*,* silk *shervani*† lace-belted, and Japan Shoe-ed. He seemed a stern man; and so inexorable, indeed, that in those days I used to take the most round-about way to the school to avoid meeting the Master, as he was known to me then, and I would rather be lashed unmercifully than bear the angry gleam of his eyes. Yet, tax my memory as I would, I could not think of an occasion on which he was hard on me, except once when he gave me a pinch on my arm—with little reason, as I think even now—for choosing, for an examination, a language whose idioms I had lisped in my cradle.

As for the revelation of the heroic itself, it came to me, on various occasions, in a variety of ways. I have heard and read a good deal about the tyranny of strong and senior students over their weak juniors, which seems to form a necessary part of an English school-life. But if the quantity of tears shed, may be indicative of the intensity of one's miseries, I don't think the most hapless English "junior" could be considered half so much tyrannised over as myself in my school-boy days. Yet my woes, the sooth to say, sprang from a different source from the tyrannical instincts of my school or class-mates—for, most of them were sincerely fond of me, would more readily have hurt themselves than hurt me, and would sooner have served me than expected any service from me. And this source was in myself—lodged in my own sensitive nature. I could not bear much teasing at any

* A *pugree* is the Indian Moslem head-dress.

† A *shervani*, is a long coat worn by Indian Moslems generally.

time, and the least offensive thing hurt me so much that, looking back to those times, I could not recollect a single day in a period of five or six years on which I went without shedding bitter tears for something or other. And, indeed, if vandalism has not white-washed away the reminiscences of those days, it may still be read on the walls of my old school, how often I had cried on such and such a day, for there was a class-mate of mine then, who seemed to take a kind of delight in recording, thereon, these little events of our school-life. But curiously enough, the one person from whom I sought relief or redress of my grievances generally at such times, was the Master—of whom, as I have said, I stood in the greatest awe. Either in my misery I forgot his sternness, or he seemed a totally different man, all affection and kindness, for the time being. Whatever the cause, I generally sought him with a tale of my woes—and he ever relieved them. On one such occasion, passing through a certain room in the school, the Master found a student seated at a table which bore a snuff-box half open. Asked as to what it contained, the boy told him that it was a powder he had been advised to use to be able to keep up reading till late in the nights. This was a lie which would not have gone unchallenged by any one else. But the Master accepted the statement without demur, and passed on well satisfied with the boy's conduct. This was revelation No. I.


Dreaded as the Master was universally in the school, it seems to me now, that it was a kind of impatient quiver of his lips and a firm purpose that glowed in the depths of his too expressive eyes, far more than the traditional birch, that excited the feeling. And in fact, I do not remember seeing him use the wand of tutorial authority except once. Running through the hall of the school-house by mistake one afternoon, I found him chastising a big boy. And for aught I can remember, the pupil was taller and

bigger-made than the Master himself. The sight had something so awful to me that I stood transfixed to the spot, and it was not till after the ringing of the bell had announced the commencement of the after-noon work that I could get away. The cause of his exhibition of temper on the Master's part was, I found afterwards, the boy having told a falsehood. This was revelation No. 2.

At a still later date, desiring to join a college elsewhere, I asked him for a certificate. And the Master's words in reply have formed the one motto of my life since. "If there is any good in you," said he in tones that I seem still to hear "others will soon find it out." This was revelation No. 3.

I might enumerate more, but I shall finish with the orthodox three.

SALĀMKEVASTHĒ.*

 WAS on excellent terms with a big functionary, in Scandalpoor, once upon a time. He was a good man and kind—at any rate he was good and kind to me, for he let me see him as often as I liked, was ever pleased to see me, and never could bear to keep me waiting out to be called in like others. This may have been due to the fact, that I was a budding newspaperman and he was afraid of displeasing me, or that I had no favour to ask and so he had no reason to be reserved or mysterious in speech and conduct, or that I was intelligent and he had vague notions of my being of some use to him some day. Whatever it was, I know this—as I did know at the time—that I was a welcome visitor. And this knowledge, I was not slow to profit by. A good story well-told has been, to me, always a rare delight—my nurse was a matchless storyteller. And this functionary, was a great man for telling a story. He was so great at it, that he never, during the whole time of my familiarity with him, told me in any single instance, even by mistake, anything but a story—or, in other words, anything least like truth. And so, it came to pass that I was a daily visitor at his place, and as regular an institution there, as any of the indiscriminate host of place-seekers and promotion-hunters that filled the verandah of his house, in the mornings. And so, I became acquainted with a remarkable man, though he was only one of the crowd, above referred to.

He was a tall and wiry man with a beard whose age was hardly concealed by its paint! His chin bespoke

* For the sake of saluting.

determination, his eyes had a downward, meditative look; and his costume, but for the *pugree* which had a very slender hold on his head, might have done credit to the taste of a man not overburdened with this world's goods, as well as dignified the bearing of one born to crores—it was neat and in faultless white. He attracted my notice by his regular attendance at my friend—the functionary's. I never missed him a single morning—nor at a corner, partly shaded by a table, in the verandah. He seldom talked to those about him, and, to my knowledge, he was never in the official's study where he talked and did business with people. My curiosity was excited. And so, one morning, I took advantage of the official's absence and engaged him in talk. He talked of all manner of things—the white man, the war in the Sudan, religion, philosophy, politics—sometimes intelligently, sometimes crazily, and sometimes amusingly—but never, in the course of about three quarters of an hour, did he let fall one word as to who he was, or what he was, or why he was there with such clock-work punctuality. I was half annoyed. And so, when the official's carriage drove in, and he alighted, and went into his study, I stayed where I was, determined to find out—something definite about this man. One after the other, the rest of the visitors went in to see my friend, and filed out. And in about a quarter of an hour, my mysterious companion and myself were the only visitors left in the verandah. The *chaprasi* came and beckoned to me to go in, as it was about time for his master to disrobe for breakfast. I pointed to my companion and said that as he had been waiting longer than myself, he might be conducted into the official's presence first. But he for whom I had spoken, would not hear of it.

“No, no, no” said he apologetically, entreatingly, and gratefully. “Don't think of me. I have nothing particular to speak to him. I am here simply for *salām*?”

I went in, had my ten minutes' chat with the functionary, and went home hoping to meet my curious acquaintance again the next day. It was about 11 a. m. when I left.

About 2 in the afternoon, I looked in at the official's for a book he had promised to lend me. I found my acquaintance again in his corner in the verandah. I asked him if he had not seen the official yet. "No",—said he most resignedly. 'I am waiting only for salām, I left him and went my way.

About 4 o'clock again, driving by my friend's house, I descried my morning companion in his corner once again. I stopped my carriage, and went in and asked him if I could drop him anywhere. "O! no," said he, "I haven't made my salām yet." I turned and fled. His patience was too much for me. It seemed too formidable for me to contemplate. But I did not know then, that Patience was the mother of virtues—at least of that virtue which might be put in apposition with butter and brandy, or ghee and curds.

* * * *

A few months later, I learnt from the *Government Gazette*, that Mr. M——, my acquaintance of that memorable morning, had just got a place of 600 Rs. with a consolidated monthly allowance of 150 Rs., in Sultanghur, in the Ryot-sweating Department.

His salām had brought its reward at last. At least so I thought.

